

## THE SAXON CHURCH

Friday 16<sup>th</sup> November was a memorable day in Bradford on Avon when the new John Maine sculpture on the east wall of the chancel of the Saxon Church was dedicated by the suffragan Bishop of Ramsbury, the Rt Revd Dr Edward Condry.

The church was full to capacity with all those who, over the years, have maintained the building and its curtilage. Joanna's service was impressive, with prayers and hymns spanning the centuries, the theme being 'living stones'.

The local churches who use the Saxon Church were represented. It was good to see the bishop, and the clergy from the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches sitting together.

The afternoon ended with a warm gathering for tea and cakes in Holy Trinity.

Our grateful thanks to all who contributed.

*Saxon Church Trustees*

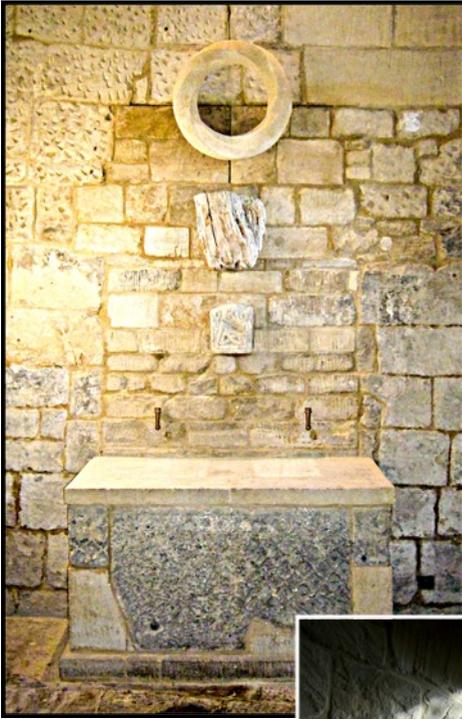


### The Design of the New Work for the East Wall of the Saxon Church

The first stage was to spend time in and around the remarkable Saxon church and to absorb the atmosphere and intensity of the spaces contained by the powerful use of stone. Many who have visited this small church remember a sense of calm and recall the dense cave-like interior as a centre for contemplation. In spite of centuries of neglect as a religious site, the building retains a strong sense of its original purpose. Today much of the Saxon decoration can only be imagined, but the two

carvings of angels and the sensitive relief on the slab which now forms the altar, suggest two parallel approaches to stone carving, the one vigorous and the other delicate. The main impact is now made by the unadorned walls and narrow rounded arches. On the exterior walls the language of circles is developed further in the blind arcading and strapwork.

My initial concern was to reinforce the simplicity of the building, to add an element at the far end which would emphasise the central axis yet keep a



the altar. Also the ambient light levels made it difficult to see the proposed relief work clearly.

This led me to revise my thoughts about removing the authentic Saxon lower fragment (set into the wall but not in an original location). I began to think about this corbel-like stone as remaining *in situ* but no longer abutting any new stonework. Instead I developed a twisting ring to be carved in stone which would encircle the intersection of the cross much higher up the wall. This would be a completely new element: in addition I wanted to link the new ring to the

lower historical relic, but without joining pieces physically. I wanted a different character for this transitional stone, and was keen to avoid a further carved piece. This was resolved when I discovered a fragment of a fossil tree which will be a kind of stepping stone between the Saxon carving and the new stone ring. The lower stone was

sense of the whole. This work is at the focal point for services within the church.

I felt that there had been confusion in the setting of the recent stonework above the altar. At first I thought that the complex of old and new stones suggesting a Saxon cross should be removed completely and replaced by a simple panel, like a reredos, with subtle relief carving. However when I took this further I realised I had set up a conflict with the character of the Saxon carved panel of



carved a thousand years ago, the central fossil was shaped 150 million years ago and the Doultong stone ring above was carved this year.

*John Maine RA.  
photos: Bryan Harris*